

Dolorosa

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 2019



In ancient Greece stories about gods and goddesses, heroes and fantastic creatures formed a part of everyday life. For the Greeks such stories explained everything from religion to weather and gave a sort of meaning to other occurrences in the world. We commonly refer to these stories as Greek mythology.

The earliest Greek myths were passed down by word of mouth. It was not until later that the plots and characters of these stories were written down for posterity. Among the numerous stories told in Greek mythology was the creation of the first human woman.

According to the myth, the god Zeus created a woman named Pandora and endowed her with many gifts. Zeus gave her wisdom, beauty, kindness, peace, generosity, and health. To make a long story short, Zeus then brought Pandora to earth to be the wife of one of the Titans named Epimetheus. As a wedding gift, Zeus gave Pandora a beautifully ornamented box with a key. The box was locked shut, and Zeus warned Pandora never to open it. This warning piqued Pandora's curiosity. She wondered what could be in the box. Over time, she grew more and more curious.

Without thought or reason, she would find herself

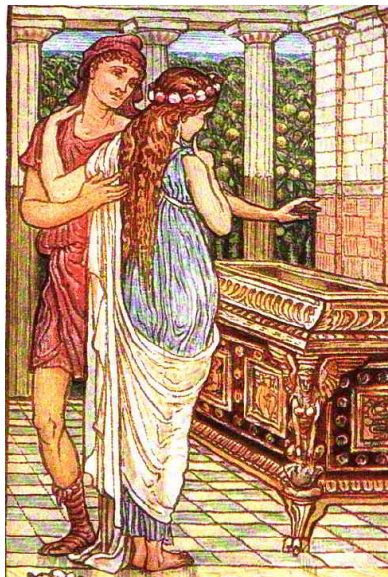
walking past the box and involuntarily reaching out to open it. Eventually, the urge to open the box overcame her, and she decided to take just a brief look inside. When nobody was around, she inserted the key into the lock, and turning it slowly, she unlocked it. As soon as she lifted the lid, horrible creatures flew out of the box. Each

creature represented some evil: greed, envy, hatred, pain, disease, hunger, poverty, war, and death. In a word, all of life's miseries had been released into the world.

Realizing what she had done, Pandora slammed the lid of the box as fast as she could, but it was too late. All the evils had already escaped to plague the world. One thing, however, remained in the box—hope.

And so, as the mythology behind this story goes, ever since that time, humans have been able to hold on to this hope to help them survive the wickedness that Pandora let out of the box.

This Greek myth of the first woman created by Zeus is similar to the true story of what happened to the first woman created by Almighty God. No doubt, the true story about Eve, in whatever shape or form it came down to the Greeks, influenced their mythology.





In the second chapter of the Book of Genesis, we read that after creating Adam from the slime of the earth, Almighty God gave him a command. “Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat,” God said, “but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat” (2:16). The Creator then enjoined a punishment for the transgression of His command: “In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death” (2:17).

Seeing that it was not good for Adam to be alone, God formed from one of Adam’s ribs a companion: Eve. Furthermore, He endowed Adam and Eve with sanctifying grace and certain preternatural gifts. These gifts meant that their lower nature and passions were subject to reason, and they possessed bodily immortality and were not subject to pain and suffering. It is also the common opinion of theologians that Adam and Eve were gifted with an infused knowledge of natural and supernatural truths. In other words, they were equipped by God with natural knowledge which would enable them to teach and guide their children as well as that measure of supernatural knowledge necessary to enable them to achieve their supernatural end. These were the gifts given to Adam and Eve by Almighty God, and these were the gifts that we, too, were destined to possess until that fateful day in the Garden of Paradise.

We read in the third chapter of Genesis that the serpent said to Eve: “Why hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?” (3:1) It was thus that Satan, the serpent from the pit of hell, began his attack. He asked a seemingly innocent question, and Eve took the bait. She replied by giving him a rather lengthy

explanation of which fruit she and Adam were permitted to eat and which fruit they were forbidden to eat. She even told him of the punishment God affixed to the transgression of His command.

Hearing this, the devil seized these last words. In response to them, he said, “No, you shall not die the death” (3:4). Is this not how he tempts even to this day? “Why can’t you do that?” he often asks. Then, when our conscience alerts us that such and such is sinful and that it offends God and that we shall go to hell if we die in mortal sin, the devil responds, as he did to Eve: “You shall not die the death”—“You won’t die and go to hell. You can go to confession. You’ll be alright.” Evidently, Satan has not changed his tactics over the years, and mankind, even after centuries, still has not learned.

After convincing Eve that she would not be punished, the devil then cunningly appealed to her pride. “God doth know,” he said, “that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil” (3:5). Eve was sold. She would be like unto God. Moses, the inspired author of Genesis, then records: “And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who did eat” (3:6).

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By opening the box that Zeus had explicitly told her not to open, Pandora released every evil into the world. So it was with Eve. By eating the fruit that God had explicitly told her not to eat and then by convincing Adam to eat of it, she released every evil into the world: sin, vice, suffering, sorrow, hunger, poverty, natural disasters, war, sickness, ignorance, and death.

It is true that Adam was the proximate cause of this, for had Eve alone eaten the fruit, we would not be in the predicament we are in today. However, since Adam is the father of the human race and ate of the fruit, we share in his sin and punishment.

Among the evils that entered the world on account of original sin are what we call the remains of



original sin. Such effects still remain in our fallen human nature even after original sin is removed at baptism. What are these effects? As we read in question #46 of the *Baltimore Catechism*, the effects of original sin are these: “Our nature was corrupted by the sin of our first parents, which darkened our understanding, weakened our will, and left us a strong inclination to evil.”

▪ **Our understanding was darkened.**

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve had knowledge without study. After the Fall, mankind was wounded with ignorance. Work and study were consequently necessary.

▪ **Our will was weakened.** Before the Fall, Adam and Eve could have easily, though obviously not absolutely, resisted temptation. Their wills were strong. It is by means of the will that we yield to temptation and commit sin. Remember that to make a sin mortal, three things are necessary: a grievous matter, sufficient reflection or full advertence, and full consent of the will. The weakness of our wills, a consequence of the Fall, is then among the reasons why it can, at times, be so difficult to resist temptation.

▪ **A strong inclination to evil.** In other words, we are strongly inclined to do what is wrong as opposed to what is right. Thus, it is often easier to commit sin than to practice virtue; easier to break the Commandments than to keep them. This is pretty obvious because if practicing virtue and avoiding sin were easy, everyone would be doing these things.

These three effects of original sin are the very reasons that make it so difficult to lead a Catholic life. Since the day Adam and Eve fell from grace, human

nature has been burdened with these three handicaps, and mankind has not really changed since the Fall. Those who lived in the Old Testament dealt with these effects of original sin, and those who live today must also deal with them. Human nature has not changed through the centuries. They were human beings then; we are human now, and we must contend with the same infirmities of nature that men of all times have had to contend.

We have not, however, been abandoned by God and left on our own to win the struggle against fallen human nature. As hope remained in Pandora’s box, hope remained after the Fall, and so, too, does hope remain today. Hope was given to Adam and Eve by Almighty God when He promised them a Redeemer to reopen the gates of heaven which they had closed to man. Today, we partake of the fruit of this hope. By means of His sufferings and death, Our Divine Savior merited for us all the grace we need to overcome our fallen human nature, the world, and the devil. This grace, which is cause for great hope, is readily available to us through the sacraments. Let us be ever ready to avail ourselves of this grace by the fervent and devout reception of the sacraments, in particular the Holy Eucharist and Penance.

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After being expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve wandered the earth. Having repented of their sin, they used their remaining years to grow in sanctity. This they did by their obedience and resignation to the will of God, by their fidelity to the duties of their state in life, and by offering up their hardships and sufferings in reparation for their sin.

The life of Eve, the first woman, is thus proof that no matter how far one has fallen from grace, no matter how far one has distanced himself from God, he can always rise, repent, and become a saint. When paradise was lost, Eve could have given in to self-pity. She could have easily said to Adam, “What’s the use now. We blew it.” But she did not say that. She was sorry for what she had done, and she held on to that hope given her by God. She was confident that God was faithful to His promise and that He would send a Redeemer who would open the gates of heaven. With this in mind, Eve strove to right the wrong she had done by living her life as perfectly as possible for God. She did this especially by being a devoted wife and

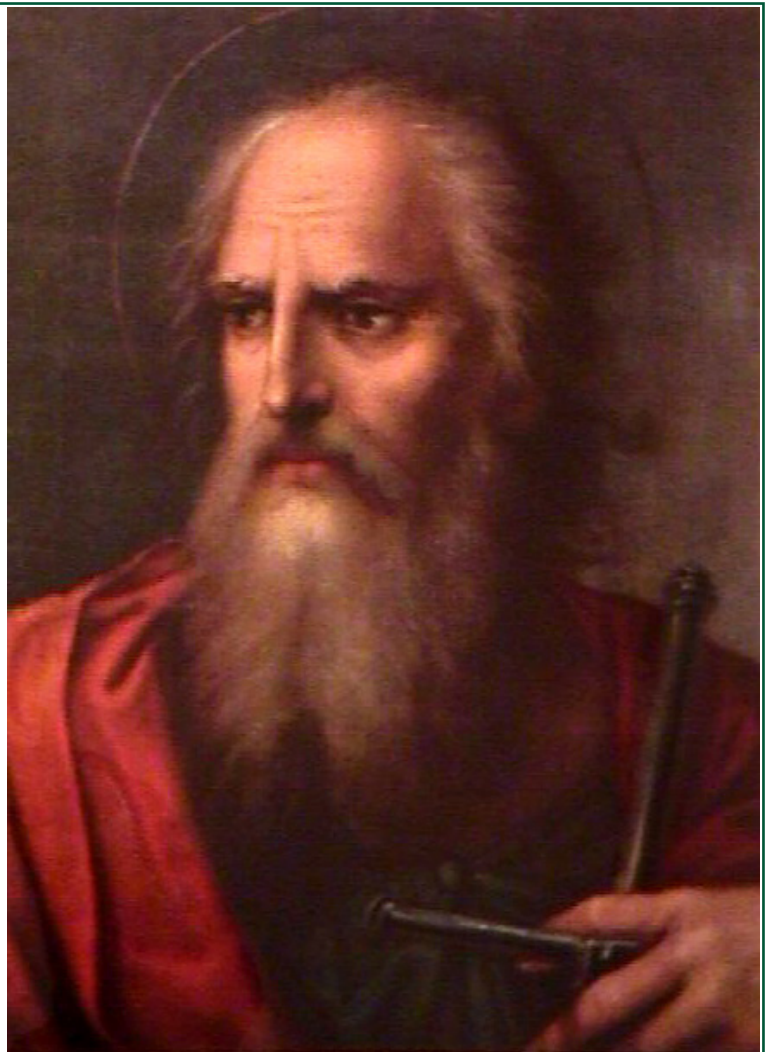
mother. In a word, she lived in such a way that she would be found worthy of entering heaven.

While we know that Adam lived to the age of nine hundred and thirty, we do not know for certain how old Eve was when she died. What we do know is that she died justified in the sight of God; she died a saint. She thus entered the Limbo of the Fathers, the place designated by God for the just ones of the Old Testament who awaited the Messiah. There, she waited until the heavenly gates were reopened by Our Divine Savior.

The life of Eve, the first woman, is thus proof that no matter how far one has fallen from grace, no matter how far one has distanced himself from God, he can still rise, repent, and become a saint.

Throughout this new series of the *Dolorosa*, we are going to take a step back in time—back into the Old Testament. People who lived in Old Testament times faced difficulties similar to what we are confronted with today. While the men of the Old Testament were the most prominent figures in the history of Israel, still certain women of those times played an extremely important role. We will thus examine the lives of several Old Testament women to see what we can learn from them.

Writing of those who lived in the Old Testament, Saint Paul says, “Now all these things happened to them in figure: and they are written for our correction . . .” (I Cor. 10:11). In other words, Saint Paul exhorts us to learn from the example of those who went before us. What we should learn is this: what we must do and what we must not do if we will save our souls. The salvation of our souls and our sanctity are truly the only things that matter in this valley of tears. If we strive, then, to learn from the example of these women and put the lessons into practice, we will surely become the saints we were born to be. And we, like many of these Old Testament women, will



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be found worthy to partake in that happiness which will never end—that happiness which is the reward for those who love God above all things and who strive throughout life to overcome themselves and the world.

